



STATE OF WASHINGTON

## WASHINGTON WORKFIRST

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To: All WorkFirst Managers

From: Nelson Meyers, Assistant Commissioner, WorkSource Operations Division, Employment Security Department (ESD)

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Paul Knox, Director, WorkFirst, Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (CTED)

Subject: WorkFirst Education and Training College Block Grant Planning

This memo provides guidance to Local Planning Area partners, particularly DSHS and ESD, as they collaborate with their college partners on the development of the WorkFirst block grant to provide training services.

### **BACKGROUND**

In February 2002, the Governor announced nearly \$60 million in shifts in WorkFirst funding so access to child-care subsidies and TANF cash grants would be protected. Included in those shifts was a \$7.5 million cut in specific college-based programs. The Governor, however, agreed to allow SBCTC to prepare an alternative plan for the reduction. That plan was to be acceptable to the WorkFirst partners, maintain funding levels for pre-employment training programs, and continue funding at some level for programs designed to help low-income, working parents increase their skills and incomes. To meet these criteria, the colleges needed to direct at least half of their remaining funds, about \$12 million per year, to pre-employment type training programs. The balance of funding could be distributed among programs such as Work Study and Tuition Assistance designed to help working parents increase their income and/or to training designed to help parents build the skills needed to get their first job.

As a result, SBCTC developed a funding model designed to integrate their six WorkFirst-funded training programs into a single block grant for each college. Previously, each had its own proposal, budget, and outcome requirements. Colleges are being asked to collaborate with their Local Planning Area partners to determine the mix of services, including Customized Job Skills Training (previously known as Pre-Employment Training), WorkFirst Financial Aid (formerly Work-Based Learning Tuition Assistance), Work Study, Basic Skills, and Wage Progression.

### **PLANNING PROCESS**

**Collaborative Planning:** The colleges and their LPA partners should develop their plans together, including the planned services and activities designed to achieve success in serving TANF and low-income parents.

**Plan Requirements:** The elements of the plan are outlined in the Plan Application sent to colleges in April. In addition, the following issues should be addressed in the plan by the partners:

- The type, length, slots, and number of customized training projects, including the number of TANF referrals necessary, should be negotiated locally. Partners should consider the current caseload and training and education needs of the TANF population, as well as employer needs when determining educational offerings. Partners should also develop plans to support the Governor's performance measure of TANF adults entering unsubsidized employment after Customized Job Skills training
- Whether open-entry, open-exit modules (see below) should be included in Customized Job Skills Training
- How the balance of the remaining college WorkFirst funding will be used. While these programs do not always require direct coordination with partners, partner referrals or partner approval, there should be some discussion as to how all the programs fit together. These programs include WorkFirst Financial Aid (formerly Work-Based Learning Tuition Assistance), Work Study, Basic Skills, and Wage Progression
- Basic Education is not a required element in the plan. While LPA partners are encouraged to discuss the need, the Governor's SubCabinet 2 will address this statewide issue in the near future.

**Submission and Approval Process:** Colleges must submit their plans by June 10 for July 1 funding. Submission delays will be accommodated, but may result in delayed funding.

Once agreement is reached, agency representatives from the local partnerships (DSHS, ESD, colleges, CJ contractor [optional]) must sign-off on their local plans. Sign-off means that the local partners are endorsing the plan and are committed to providing the college with necessary referrals. Locally approved plans will be reviewed by a SBCTC review team which will be expanded to include WorkFirst partners. Final approval of the plans, and the commensurate funding, will be issued by July 1 for the colleges that have submitted their plans by June 10.

If local partners are unable to reach agreement on their local plan, technical assistance will be available. A process for addressing those disagreements will be developed by SubCabinet 3.

After final approval of the plans, the SBCTC will prepare for the Governor a composite of the plans reflecting how the \$7.5 million budget cut was managed and the mutual commitment of the local WorkFirst partners in meeting the Governor's performance measures.

**Targeted Population:** The first level of priority for education and training services should be current TANF parents. Only TANF participants count toward the Governor's performance measure for the colleges of unsubsidized employment.

Former TANF participants (having left within 12 months) should receive the second level of priority for service. Working parents at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty level are the third level of priority.

**Performance Measures:** The FY03 performance measures, such as placements from Customized Job Skills Training, have been settled in principle and will be finalized when the WorkFirst Performance Measures are approved by the Governor's SubCabinet. The minimum targets for entered employments from Customized Job Skills Training as outlined in the Plan Application are based on FY02 data.

WorkFirst partner administrators expect that responsibility for meeting the colleges' performance targets is shared among all the partners at the local level.

## **CUSTOMIZED JOB SKILLS TRAINING:**

### **Definition:**

Available to TANF and low-income parents, Customized Job Skills Training is short-term individualized or group training for a specific job occupation with identified openings with a higher than average starting wage than the average for all WorkFirst job entries for that region. Customized Job Skills Training is developed in cooperation with an employer or group of employers who have identified job openings. While a job is not guaranteed, there is a high likelihood of employment.

The definition of Customized Job Skills Training is similar to Pre-Employment Training, but has been broadened to include the following information:

- Integrated Basic Skills is not a stand-alone program. It is basic skills integrated into Customized Job Skills Training.
- The current length of training is up to 22 weeks. The participant must enter the training within four weeks, taking advantage of up to four weeks of open-entry, open-exit preparation training preceding Customized Job Skills Training.
- Open-entry, open-exit modules are designed to engage the parent quickly and prepare him/her for the training programs. They may be used in preparation for other college training programs described in their plan.
- While open-entry, open-exit is preferred, it is not required. It is the shared responsibility of the local college, ESD, and DSHS partners to discuss the option and address in the plan whether or not it will be used.

**Longer-Term Customized Job Skills Training:** Local plans may include some longer term training, such as High Wage, High Demand or Customized Job Skills Training with Integrated Basic Skills, if the partners agree. The criteria for approving longer-term training includes:

- There are sufficient clients in need of the specified training.
- Unit costs and length of training demonstrate that placement targets are achievable within the reduced budget.

**Referrals and Targets for Customized Job Skills Training:** As with current policy, referrals will be made through ESD. ESD is responsible for meeting the referral targets agreed to locally. The colleges will recruit and market their programs during job search activities, CSO meetings, and other partner venues. LEP clients will continue to be referred through DSHS to the LEP Pathway.

Job Service Specialists will make referrals for Customized Job Skills Training as quickly as possible, and Case Managers will approve the training on the IRP for any participant the college accepts into an approved Customized Job Skills Training class.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

If you need further information about WorkFirst education and training college block grant planning, please contact:

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